The University of Chicago

THE DRAMA OF JEAN DESMARESTS SIEUR DE SAINT-SORLIN 1636-1643

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
AUGUST, 1941

By
JOHN HIBBARD STELLWAGEN

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SUMMARY*

Preface

Previous work on Desmarests has been inaccurate except for the brief mention in Professor Lancaster's great History. The need for a modern study of Desmarests's drama in relation to his life and times remains.

This dissertation was undertaken to meet this need by giving an account of Saint-Sorlin's life up to and during the period of his dramatic work, with an intensive study of each play and a discussion of his ballets. The method followed has been that developed by Professor Nitze in his seminars on Corneille, Racine, and Molière, combining both textual and critical analyses.

This study has led to a new point of view on Desmarests, suggesting that he should be regarded as an important figure of his own period and a great precursor of Molière rather than as the fanatic mediocrity of the eighteenth-century legend accepted till now.

I. Background

Early life.--Examination of additional evidence shows that Saint-Sorlin himself most often spelled his name Desmarests. The date of his birth is uncertain: 1595 or 1596. Apparently a Parisian of good family and education, studious as a youth, he early

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*This is a condensation, chapter by chapter, of a dissertation in the University of Chicago Libraries.

gave evidence of varied natural aptitudes and versatility.

The Academy; Richelieu's favor.--One of the first additions to the pre-academy group, around 1630-31, Desmarests also joined Richelieu's entourage to serve the Cardinal as conversationalist, poet, architect, and organizer of the Academy. A novelist and would-be epic poet, he is said to have begun writing plays at the Cardinal's instance.

The Paris stage, 1636.--The Hôtel de Bourgogne and Marais theatres were established; the unities were gaining in prestige, and theatrical conditions improving. Tragi-comedy and comedy were the most popular genres.

II. Aspasie

Performance and publication.--Probably written in the winter of 1635-1636, Aspasie, a comedy, was produced before the duke of Parma at Richelieu's palace on February 19, 1636, and published in the same year. From the text it appears that the setting permitted both accord with the unity of place and change of scenery.

Analysis.--Without each other's knowledge, Lysis and his father Argileon love Aspasie, whose love for Lysis is unknown to her parents. Both father and son decide to ask for her, but when Lysis appeals to his uncle Telephe to gain Argileon's consent, the latter has already secured that of Agenor and Hersilie, Aspasie's parents. Rebelling only momentarily, Aspasie submits and goes through a ceremony with Argileon, who leaves her, ordering her to go home with his servant Telesin. Lysis learns what has happened, swoons, and laments with her. Dionée, Aspasie's friend, enlightens and denounces Hersilie. Telephe finally sees Argileon, who at once accuses the young people of incest. When Lysis would take leave of Aspasie in his father's garden, both swoon and are found thus by Argileon--who also swoons--and her parents, who think them dead

and regret the hasty ceremony. Since it has presumably not been consummated, nor completed by having the marriage bed blessed by a prestre d'Hyménée, the parents reunite the lovers when they revive.

Technique and sources.--A comedy in name only, Aspasie is unsuccessful in plot, character, and structure. The unities and propriety are technically observed, but there is no real decorum, either inner or outer. The source may be the Stratonice episode in Plutarch's Lives, used to modify the story of Aspasia. The setting in a garden may be reminiscent of the Comédie des Tuilleries.

Criticism.--Praised by the Gazette and by Richelieu, Aspasie, although once reprinted in the eighteenth century, has since been condemned by critics with more or less justice.

III. Les Visionnaires

Performance and publication.--Still being written in January, 1637, and involved in the beginning of the Quarrel of the Cid at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, Les Visionnaires, a comedy, was performed by March 6, 1637, at the Marais theatre before a single set, and published in the same year and often thereafter. The part of Amidor was played by Mondory, and that of Artabaze probably by Bellemore.

Analysis.--Artabaze, an unusually exaggerated braggart soldier, is frightened by the poetic ravings of Amidor, a caricature of Ronsard and of Desmarests himself, who in turn causes Filidan, a dilettante who admires all verse he cannot understand, in love with love, to swoon with ecstasy over a grotesque description of a woman. Filidan is found thus by Hesperie, sure that all men love her and that Filidan has swooned for love of her. Her father Alcidon, explaining to his brother Lysandre (the voice of

common sense) that he cannot choose between his daughters' suitors, determines to end his perplexity by accepting Filidan as one of them, and planning to marry off the other girls at once.

Phalante, rich only in imagination, is refused by Melisse, Hesperie's sister, who loves only Alexander the Great. Sestiane, the drama-mad sister, seizes Hesperie's argument with Melisse--which introduces an unusual bit of local color, mention of the "king of Ethiopia"--over Phalante's love as an opportunity to discuss the drama with Amidor. This introduces the problem of the unities versus the romanesque in a passage which aligns Desmarests with the réguliers. Alcidon, thinking him a suitor, accepts Amidor.

Artabaze's offer to cure Filidan's woes by sword-play is cut short by his fright at the poetic language of Amidor, who is unable to persuade the braggart to play the part of Alexander in a play he has written. To help win Melisse, Amidor sells Phalante comic verses parodying both supposed Pleïade theory and Desmarests himself. At Lysandre's suggestion, Alcidon accepts Phalante.

Melisse, thinking Artabaze is Alexander the Great, pursues him, shocking Hesperie, who thinks Filidan's laments are intended for her. Artabaze awes Alcidon into accepting him as a suitor.

Lysandre solves Alcidon's problem of four accepted suitors --of whom three are supposedly asking for Melisse--for three daughters by confronting of the seven with the opportunity of marriage, which each refuses in turn on the basis of his own mania.

Technique and sources.--The unities and propriety are observed and the scenes are linked with care for necessity in entrances and exits. Desmarests used one historical source and may have used ideas from Rotrou, Mareschal, and the Five Authors.

Bautru may have suggested one scene. It is doubtful that the play is a pièce à clefs.

Criticism and influence.--Rather its probable accuracy in depiction of contemporary types led to its immediate success, continued through the classical period. It influenced Molière in Les Femmes savantes and possibly also in Les Précieuses ridicules and Les Fâcheux.

IV. Scipion

Performance and publication.--Writing more verse for the Cardinal, working with the Academy on its Sentiments on the Cid, and on his own Clovis, frequenting the Hôtel de Rambouillet, Desmarests finished Scipion, his first tragi-comedy, for performance before May 18, 1638 (probably at the Marais theatre), obtained a general privilège in March, 1639, for all his work past and future, and at once used it for Scipion.

Analysis.--Preceded by an unacted prologue praising vertu, the play uses Scipio's capture of Cartagena (Desmarests's first statement of scene location) as a background for the love of Clinde, a hostage princess, and Lucidan, a prince allied with Carthage. This love is imperiled first by the Moor Garamante's betrayal of the city to the Romans, interrupted by the introduction of the vengeful princess Hyanisbe as a threat to Garamante; second, by Lucidan's duel with Garamante, who has used a scarf which Clinde had made for Lucidan to trick Clinde; third, by Scipio's sudden love for Clinde, combated by his Roman vertu; fourth, by Garamante's claim for Clinde as the promised reward from Scipio of his treachery, nullified by Hyanisbe's prior claim. Lucidan wins Clinde as a result of Scipio's magnanimity and the appearance of Hyanisbe.

Technique and sources.--The unities of time and place are preserved; that of action is violated by the romanesque sub-plot.

Propriety is maintained. The play suffers from disproportion and discrepancy of interest between its real and supposed themes. This results in structure similar to that of the cinema serial, with major emphasis on the outer action; only in the fourth act does the outer action depend upon the inner. The source is an episode in Livy modified by romanesque elements and by traits from Desmarests's own work.

Criticism.--Desmarests felt that the merit of Scipion lay in the inuention of the sujet, full of vertu, and called the play a tragi-comedy instead of a tragedy to accord with the custom of his time. Chapelain thought it better written and more decorous than the Cid. Balzac bracketed it with the Cid. Later critics condemned it. A possible influence on Corneille and indication of Richelieu's taste, Scipion most of all reminds us of the novelist in Desmarests.

V. Roxane

Performance and publication.--Already at work on his last play, Europe, in January, 1639, Desmarests also wrote the lyrics for the Ballet de la Félicité, danced at Ruel, Saint-Germain, and the Palais-Cardinal in February and March to celebrate the birth of the Dauphin, the future Louis XIV. Desmarests's tragi-comedy Roxane was performed--probably at the Marais theatre--in the same year, perhaps the same spring, and printed between June 12 and July 4, 1640.

Analysis.--The Persian satrap Phradate's love for his betrothed, Roxane, impells him to rebel against Alexander the Great. The satrap Cohortane, Roxane's father, not only refuses to join Phradate, but urges Roxane to win Alexander, which is exactly what Phradate fears will happen. While Phradate is in hiding, Alexander does fall in love with Roxane, but grants her request that he

pardon Phradate. Unfortunately Phradate's jealousy leads him to accuse her of infidelity, to which her father again urges her, and to which her heart is gradually inclining in spite of her vertu, constancy. Determining to kill Alexander, Phradate incites the Greek generals, including Clyte, against both Alexander and Roxane. She overhears this, denounces Phradate, and tells Alexander of the conspiracy, now asking that he either marry her with his army's consent or let her die.

When he attempts to kill Alexander, Phradate is himself killed on stage by a guard, violating bienséance. Dying, he curses Roxane and Alexander with their historical fate. Alexander kills Clyte, again on stage. At the army's plea, Roxane accepts Alexander, saving him from remorseful suicide.

Technique and sources.--The unities of time and place are observed. The unity of action may be interpreted as either observed or not observed; this depends upon acceptance of second-act exposition. The proprieties are violated by the two murders on stage. Desmarests is his own best source; Roxane's plot is basically that of Scipion, omitting Hyanisbe and placing Garamante in the initial position of Lucidan, as Phradate. The marriage and character of Alexander are taken from Quintus Curtius.

Criticism.--Roxane, while an effort to please Richelieu which apparently succeeded, should not be considered as the Cardinal's work. Voiture hypocritically praised it, while later critics condemned it. Actually it is the high point of Desmarests's achievement in dramatic structure, depiction of character, and approach to the spirit of tragedy.

VI. Mirame

Performance and publication.--During 1639 Desmarests supplied occasional verse to Richelieu and published the first and

only volume of his unfinished novel Rosane, which was to have consisted of five volumes. Mirame, apparently intended for performance and publication in 1639, and so dated in most works on the theatre, did not appear until the completion of the great theatre of the Palais-Cardinal, where the gala performance took place on January 14, 1641. The tragi-comedy was published in the same year after the performance of Desmarests's next ballet in February.

Analysis.--Mirame, princess of Bithynia, secretly returns the love of Arimant, former ambassador from Colchos to her father, the king of Bithynia, whose suggestion that she marry his ally Azamor, king of Phrygia, she rejects by claiming fidelity to her dead suitor, the prince of Colchos, as her vertu. Arimant in a secret meeting at night gains Mirame's assent to his proposal to win her by martial conquest as a means of nullifying the difference in rank between them--a trait possibly taken from Du Ryer. At first victorious, then defeated and captured by Azamor, Arimant is wounded--it is thought mortally--by a slave at his own request. The confidant Almire brings news of Arimant's death to Mirame, who plans suicide, assuring Azamor that she will have no other husband than he, in order to get rid of him. Almire joins Mirame in use of a drug which she furnishes. As the king and Azamor learn of this, an ambassador from Colchos reveals that Arimant was Azamor's brother. The king and Azamor are in despair, but are relieved by Mirame's awakening and the news that Arimant had only fainted from loss of blood. Azamor renounces his suit. Since Arimant is now her equal in rank, Mirame may marry him.

Technique and sources.--The unities of time and place are stressed by the setting and lighting, but that of action does not exist in view of the use of three romanesque last-act reversals. This, with excessive use of pointes (contrary to Desmarests's own

doctrine), suggests that Richelieu's influence may be stronger than in the other plays. It is a reworking not of the Cid, but of Desmarests's own dramas, with a setting in a garden, a heroine loving contrary to her father's wishes, a pair of lovers who seek death at the same time and think this world to be the next upon returning to consciousness, and the use of character-names beginning with the letter A.

Criticism.--Contemporary critics found the play no better for its elaborate setting and use of change of lighting to indicate nightfall and daybreak. The idea of people at court that Mirame was an attack on Anne of Austria does not seem to be justified. Later critics condemn it, though Reynier gives it qualified praise.

VII. Erigone

Performance and publication.--In February, 1641, Desmarests's Ballet de la Prospérité des Armes de la France was danced in the Mirame theatre. In May Desmarests wrote a pastoral dialogue for the betrothal of Michel Lambert, Richelieu's composer. Shortly afterward the Guirlande was presented to Julie d'Angennes, containing Desmarests's La Violette of the year before and Les Lys. Erigone, a tragi-comedy in prose, was performed at the Palais-Cardinal on January 19, 1642, and published in the same year, presumably in March.

Analysis.--Eurydice, queen of Taprobane, orders her daughter Erigone to marry the king of Carmania by proxy through his brother Cleomene, due to arrive as ambassador. Erigone secretly loves Ptolomée, prince of Arabia, who refuses to accept her sudden determination to obey her mother. Apparently drowned when Erigone dismisses him, Ptolomée returns disguised as Cleomene, whom Eurydice expects to marry in accordance with an oracle. Successfully playing

this part with much quiproquo, Ptolomée marries Erigone, planning to take her away. Eurydice, however, insists on his remaining to marry her. The young couple's flight is stopped when Asterie, Erigone's confidant, explains to Eurydice the identity of Cleomene, who had escaped from Ptolomée only to be imprisoned as a pirate, by Eurydice, at Ptolomée's suggestion. This explanation involves much confusion and comic difficulty. When he is released, Cleomene at once loves Eurydice, who accepts him upon his turning out to be the king of Carmania in person. Erigone and Ptolomée are forgiven, and may marry when Ptolomée secures his father's consent.

Technique and sources.--The use of disguise and double meaning results in tone close to that of comedy, but the characters and setting (in a garden, like that of Aspasie and Mirame) make the play technically a tragi-comedy, even according to Desmarests's own definition. The unities of time and place are observed, but that of action depends on acceptance of second-act exposition. The scenes may not be linked. The use of prose may result from Chapelain's theory of vraisemblance. Again Desmarests is his own best source. Erigone shows traits of Aspasie, Sestiane, Roxane and Mirame. Ptolomée reminds us that Arimant had won Mirame's love while acting as an ambassador. A sea-fight off stage had been used in Mirame, and an island locale in the novel Rosane.

Criticism.--Contemporary critics do not mention the play. The eighteenth century condemned it. In spite of the statements of Gebhardt and Kerviler, it has nothing to do with LaGrange-Chancel's play of the same name. Containing some dramatic moments, it probably failed because of its prose.

VIII. Europe

Performance and publication.--Already being written in 1639, Europe was ordered performed at the Palais-Cardinal in costumes

for which Richelieu had paid, on November 15 or 18, 1642, because of Richelieu's impending death. The play was issued anonymously by Desmarests's publisher, Henry le Gras, on January 13, 1643.

Analysis.--The comédie héroïque is completely an allegory, with a prologue spoken by Peace and characters representing the nations. The setting is probably a hall in the palace of Queen Europe, where are discussed the plots of Ibère (Spain), aided by Germanique (Germany), for the conquest of Queen Europe. Momentarily successful against Ausonie (Italy)--a presentation of Richelieu's action against Casal at the time of and following the siege of La Rochelle--Ibère is foiled in his attempts to use Austrasie (Lorraine) by the counter-action of Francion (France). This refers particularly to the conspiracies of 1642, discovered at the same time that France was successful in military action.

Technique and sources.--This attempt to dramatize France's part in the Thirty Years' War is unsuccessful, with only nominal observance of the unity of time. Disproportion destroys the unity of action, and that of place is part of the allegory. The scenes are not linked, which helps to make the play a series of political speeches. Containing one character-name reminiscent of Scipion, the play was probably inspired by Richelieu himself.

Criticism.--Europe has been generally condemned as a play and used as a means of attacking Richelieu, as by Fontenelle, whose comments should not be ascribed, as they have been, to d'Olivet. The play should not be identified with La Grande Pastorale.

IX. Later Life

The lost plays.--At the time of Richelieu's death Desmarests was working on two plays which he left unfinished, Annibal and Le Charmeur charmé. The completed manuscript of another, Le Gourd, although mentioned in the eighteenth century as still extant,

has apparently been lost; it seems to have been a comedy in the meter of farce. There is no evidence of the fate of a play supposed to have been made from the novel Ariane without Desmarests's permission, except for one in Dutch in 1644.

The legendary fanatic.--Previous studies of Desmarests have depicted him as, after 1643, an increasingly maniacal religious fanatic. The evidence shows him rather as a courtier serving Mme. d'Aiguillon and the duc de Richelieu, and as a government official whose defense of his own work, together with his exposure of an apparent plot against the life of Louis XIV, made him an easy objective for the attacks of Nicole, Bayle, and Voltaire, since accepted.

Conclusion.--Desmarests really ended his days as a conscientious member of the Academy he had helped to found, working steadily on the Dictionary after his final activity in launching the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns.